

The Sounds Beneath: Dominant Discourses, Silent Voices and Cultural Echoes in *The Shape of Water*

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Abstract: *The paper aims to explore the ways in which the dominant discourse and the more elusive voices of largely silent protagonists mingle and compete in two distinct yet complementary takes on the same story, Guillermo del Toro's 2017 romantic fantasy and Daniel Kraus's 2018 novelization. In addition to contrasting the ambitions driving Richard Strickland, the quintessential white western male, with the mysterious powers animating the narrative's quietest yet most eloquent protagonists (Elisa Esposito and the Amphibian Man / Deus Brânquia), the analysis will focus on an eclectic cast of ostensibly vocal but culturally silenced characters ranging from the failed artist / closeted homosexual to the idealistic scientist / disillusioned Soviet spy, the apparently shallow and materialistic yet insightful and enterprising housewife and the outspoken cleaner, undaunted by the dual challenges of race and gender. Whilst pointing out the various desires, frustrations and obstacles alternately furthering and thwarting each individual's pursuit of happiness, the paper will also endeavor to highlight not only the concrete details of the historical background against which the plot unfolds but also the wider cultural ripples occasioned by Elisa's dreams and actions, in particular the fairy tale echoes blending in with the prosaic landscape of early 1960s America and the myriad of references to literary texts and visual culture pervading cinematic narrative and prose rendition alike.*

Keywords: *Guillermo del Toro, intertextuality, Daniel Kraus, marginalization, otherness, plagiarism, silencing*